

# Congress of the United States

## Washington, DC 20515

June 17, 2022

The Honorable Lloyd Austin  
Secretary of Defense  
U.S. Department of Defense  
1000 Defense Pentagon  
Washington, D.C. 20301

The Honorable Alejandro Mayorkas  
Secretary of Homeland Security  
245 Murray Lane, SW  
Washington, DC 20528-0075

Dear Secretary Austin and Secretary Mayorkas,

We write to urge you to extend and enhance policies to improve servicemembers' access to abortion care and other reproductive health services, strengthen privacy protections, and provide servicemembers with the resources they need to obtain care. After decades of attacks on abortion rights from anti-abortion lawmakers, a leaked Supreme Court draft opinion in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* has revealed the Court is poised to eliminate the constitutional right to abortion. We are gravely concerned about servicemembers' reproductive privacy and health care rights, especially given the unique challenges that servicemembers face, including for those who are stationed in states that are poised to ban or restrict abortion and potentially other reproductive care if the Court dismantles *Roe v. Wade*.

Already, we are deeply alarmed by the barriers that servicemembers currently face when seeking abortion care - and this will only worsen as dozens of states prepare to ban abortion as the Supreme Court is poised to overturn the constitutional right to abortion. Reproductive health care, including abortion, is a time-sensitive procedure. However, servicemembers face a myriad of challenges when seeking abortion care, from needing to request approval from their commander to take leave, to traveling long distances when they are stationed in places where abortion is unavailable, to lacking the financial means to travel off base for the care, including renting a car, purchasing a plane ticket, or paying hotel costs. Further, upon return to duty, servicemembers may face retaliation for having an abortion if the information is disclosed to their commander or other servicemembers. These hurdles are in addition to servicemembers needing to navigate both federal bans on abortion care and healthcare coverage when seeking an abortion.

We are pleased the Secretaries of the Army and Air Force acted to improve servicemembers' access to abortion care by establishing policies that enable servicemembers to request leave for abortion care without requiring pre-approval from their commander or disclosing the nature of the health care service. Prior to this policy change, soldiers, airmen, and guardians could be required to disclose to their commander that they were requesting leave for abortion care. Under such a policy, it is possible that a commander refuses to grant the leave, or later retaliates against

the servicemember because of personal objections to abortion. These changes are a step in the right direction and, at minimum, must be extended to all military services, as we firmly believe that access to care for our servicemembers and military families should not be determined by the personal beliefs of others.

The Department of Defense (DoD) and Department of Homeland Security (DHS) must use all means to protect the health and well-being of those who serve and their loved ones. As such, we ask that DoD and DHS implement the following changes: first, remove barriers for taking leave by extending the Army and Air Force's current leave policies for abortion care across all the military services; second, strengthen servicemember privacy and protect against retaliation; and third, provide direct financial support for servicemembers requiring travel for abortion care.

DoD and DHS must protect servicemembers from potential consequences for the servicemember after they have an abortion - including a hostile work environment if others in their ranks discover that they sought or obtained an abortion. You should be clear that such retaliation is forbidden.

Finally, in a post-*Roe* world, servicemembers stationed in states where abortion is banned or severely restricted will need additional leave, resources, and financial support to facilitate travel to states where abortion is accessible. Many servicemembers have limited to no access to a car - increasing the costs of accessing an abortion. The consequence of delays and challenges in accessing care across multiple states could mean that the servicemember is forced to carry a pregnancy against their will. The DoD and DHS must therefore ensure that all military services provide sufficient leave that allows servicemembers to navigate the multiple hurdles and delays while also ensuring that the servicemember has the means (including by offering subsidies and reimbursement for the costs of travel) to travel off base and to a different state, if necessary, to obtain medical care.

Everyone, including members of our military and their families, should be free to make decisions about their futures and families, including the decision to have an abortion. Moreover, limiting access to these services will negatively impact the morale, retention, overall health of the joint force, and deeply harm the overall readiness of the Armed Forces. The DoD and DHS must immediately strengthen its policies across the board to support a servicemember seeking an abortion both before and after they seek such care. You must act urgently to update the policies of our Armed Forces - and commit to a future where our servicemembers and their loved ones have the freedom to control their own bodies, safely care for their families, and live with dignity.

Thank you for your leadership, partnership, and continued service to our nation – we look forward to working with you on these efforts.

Sincerely,



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Jason Crow  
Member of Congress



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Jackie Speier  
Member of Congress



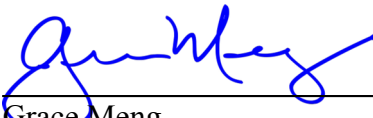
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Veronica Escobar  
Member of Congress



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Gerald E. Connolly  
Member of Congress



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Grace Meng  
Member of Congress



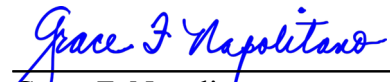
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Chrissy Houlahan  
Member of Congress



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Barbara Lee  
Member of Congress



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Grace F. Napolitano  
Member of Congress



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Nikema Williams  
Member of Congress



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Eleanor Holmes Norton  
Member of Congress



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Sara Jacobs  
Member of Congress



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James P. McGovern  
Member of Congress



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Adriano Espaillat  
Member of Congress



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Gwen S. Moore  
Member of Congress



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John Garamendi  
Member of Congress



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Danny K. Davis  
Member of Congress



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Ami Bera, M.D.  
Member of Congress



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Ruben Gallego  
Member of Congress



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Anthony G. Brown  
Member of Congress



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Rick Larsen  
Member of Congress




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Dina Titus  
Member of Congress



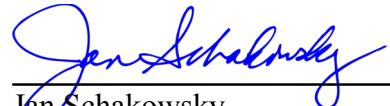
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Alan Lowenthal  
Member of Congress



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Sean Casten  
Member of Congress



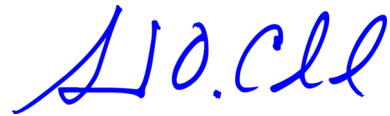
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Jan Schakowsky  
Member of Congress



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Sheila Jackson Lee  
Member of Congress



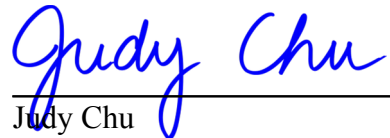
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Salud Carbajal  
Member of Congress



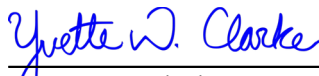
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Carolyn B. Maloney  
Member of Congress



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Judy Chu  
Member of Congress



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Yvette D. Clarke  
Member of Congress



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Mark Pocan  
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Earl Blumenauer  
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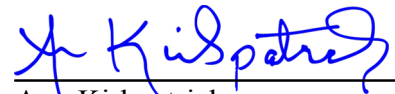
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Frederica S. Wilson  
Member of Congress



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Sylvia R. Garcia  
Member of Congress



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Ann Kirkpatrick  
Member of Congress



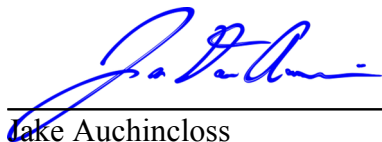
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Henry C. "Hank" Johnson, Jr.  
Member of Congress



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Shontel M. Brown  
Member of Congress



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Jake Auchincloss  
Member of Congress

*André Carson*

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André Carson  
Member of Congress

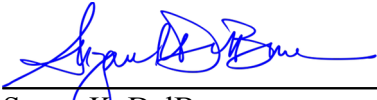


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Diana DeGette  
Member of Congress

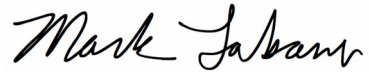
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Karen Bass  
Member of Congress



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Suzan K. DelBene  
Member of Congress



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Mark Takano  
Member of Congress



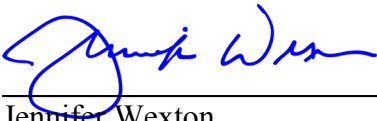
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Ted W. Lieu  
Member of Congress



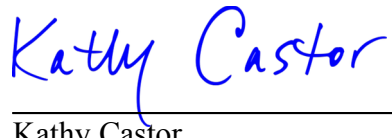
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Mary Gay Scanlon  
Member of Congress



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Jennifer Wexton  
Member of Congress



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Kathy Castor  
Member of Congress



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David E. Price  
Member of Congress



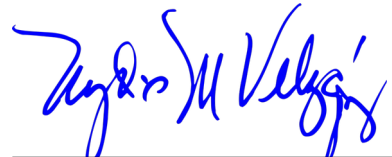
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Betty McCollum  
Member of Congress



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Steven Horsford  
Member of Congress



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Nydia M. Velázquez  
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Julia Brownley  
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Jamie Raskin  
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Katie Porter  
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Peter A. DeFazio  
Member of Congress



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David J. Trone  
Member of Congress



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Mondaire Jones  
Member of Congress



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Jim Cooper  
Member of Congress



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Lois Frankel  
Member of Congress



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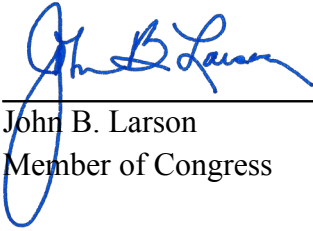
Peter Welch  
Member of Congress



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Chris Pappas  
Member of Congress





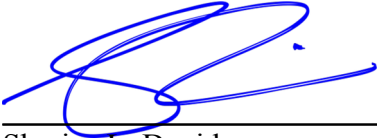
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John B. Larson  
Member of Congress



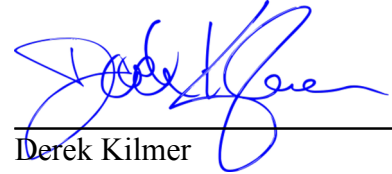
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Lucy McBath  
Member of Congress



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Sharice L. Davids  
Member of Congress



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Derek Kilmer  
Member of Congress



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Lori Trahan  
Member of Congress



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Pramila Jayapal  
Member of Congress



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Marie Newman  
Member of Congress



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Ayanna Pressley  
Member of Congress



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Jahana Hayes  
Member of Congress



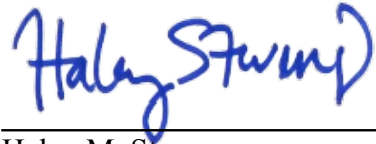
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Brenda L. Lawrence  
Member of Congress



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Al Green  
Member of Congress



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Haley M. Stevens  
Member of Congress



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Darren Soto  
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Tony Cárdenas  
Member of Congress



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Norma J. Torres  
Member of Congress



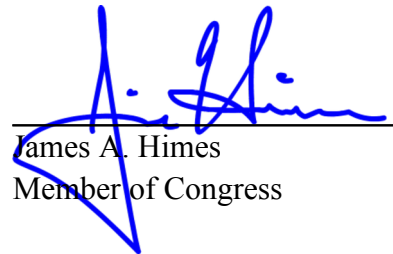
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Ted Deutch  
Member of Congress



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Jamaal Bowman, Ed.D.  
Member of Congress



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James A. Himes  
Member of Congress



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Jared Huffman  
Member of Congress



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Elissa Slotkin  
Member of Congress



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Kim Schrier, M.D.

Member of Congress

CC:

The Honorable Christine Wormuth, Secretary of the Army

The Honorable Carlos Del Toro, Secretary of the Navy

The Honorable Frank Kendall, Secretary of the Air Force

Admiral Linda L. Fagan, Commandant of the Coast Guard

General Daniel R. Hokanson, Chief of the National Guard Bureau